

LIMERICK SOCIALIST

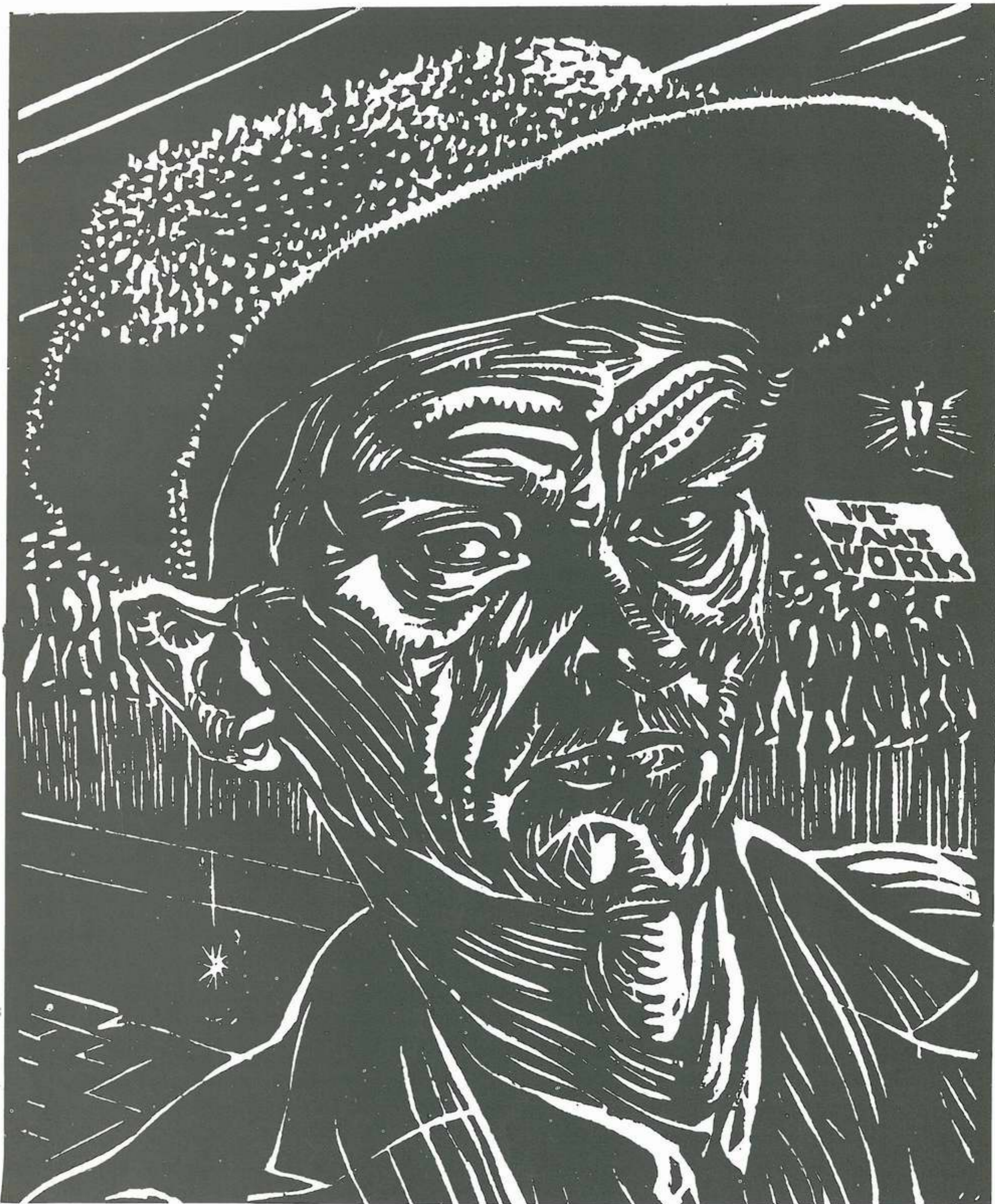
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THE
VOICE
OF THE
WORKER

'That which is good for the working class I esteem patriotic . . . ' *James Connolly*



IRELAND

PAST AND FUTURE

Irish society has been transformed during the past 20 years. The country has become industrialised and urbanised. Wage and salary-earners, rather than farmers, now form the majority of the working population. The average age of the population is younger. A stagnant society has come to life.

Irish society has been transformed. Why hasn't Irish politics been transformed? Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and the tame, tired Labour Party are still Nos. 1, 2 and 3, just as they were 20 years ago. To a certain extent Fianna Fail and Fine Gael have adapted to social change, while the Labour Party has just drifted. But all these parties are parties of the past.

The conservative slogan, "what was good enough for my father is good enough for me", was often spoken 20 years ago. Very few people would say it now. Many people would face torture rather than say it. Such conservatism is completely out of touch with the mood of a young, ambitious, open-minded society.

Yet it often seems that what was good enough for our fathers in politics is good enough for us. We tolerate the politics that was good enough for our fathers. Our existing political parties developed in the effort to establish an Irish nation-state. The Irish nation-state was established for, and by, a rural Catholic people who were narrow-minded and conservative in social philosophy and religious belief.

We have inherited the Irish nation-state from our fathers (and our mothers - but the old conservative slogans do not mention women!). There is no need for us to continue their

struggles to establish it, because it has been established securely. What politics should be concerned with from now on is the social and cultural needs of the people. Employment, industrial organisation, taxation, women's rights, church-state relations, are problem areas. No satisfactory attempt has yet been made to tackle the problems.

But what priorities has Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and the Labour Party? They don't want to put their own houses in order. They want to put Northern Ireland's house in order.

The traditional attitude of political parties in the Republic towards Northern Ireland is blind and senseless. It is the attitude of people who are living in the past. They are still trying to establish the Irish nation-state, except in a wider area. They want to impose the Irish nation-state on 1½ million people, the majority of whom do not want it.

Irish unity is pie-in-the-sky. The priority should be to establish normal, friendly, peaceful and democratic relations with the people of Northern Ireland. To do that we must respect the wishes or the majority there who say that they want to be British citizens and do not want to unite with us.

An intelligent and democratic attitude to Northern Ireland is the dividing-line between the politics of the future and the politics of the past. This is why Socialists Against Nationalism places so much emphasis on the need to repeal Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution, which lay claim to Northern Ireland's territory.

POEMS

By Gerard Ryan

PLASSY

A corona of elder flowers
Whitens the dim twilight,
A mist like a hag's grey hair
Spread over the water.
No sound at all—
Strange this stillness
...Strange...
We look at each other
And no word spoken.
Why such a twilight
And no word spoken?

SONG

Tears by early grief distilled
O soon, soon will dry,
The crimson chalice of
The heart, has spilled
No more, no more shall dry.

O seas, O rivers weep,
Sooner your tears be dried
Than tears of love,
Through aeons move
Ane time itself must sleep,
No more, no more be dried.

SCRAP ARTICLES—2 & 3 DROP THE CLAIM ON NORTHERN IRELAND

SOCIALISTS AGAINST NATIONALISM

We believe: That the clear wish of the majority of people in Northern Ireland to remain citizens of the United Kingdom must be respected.

We declare: That socialists must accept the present state boundaries in Ireland as a basis for developing socialist politics. The call for a 32-county socialist Republic is nothing more than the old nationalism newly dressed in a socialist guise.

We oppose: The demand for the British Government to declare its intention to withdraw from Northern Ireland.

We demand: That the Government of the Republic should recognise as legitimate the present constitutional status of Northern Ireland. To this end we demand that Articles 2 and 3 of the Republic's Constitution, which lays claim to Northern Ireland's territory, be dropped. This is clearly required by the Helsinki Agreement, which was signed by the Republic in 1975.

Membership: Membership is open to all those who support our aims.

Contact: 33 Greenhill Road, Garryowen, Limerick.

THE SIEGE OF THE LOCK MILLS

Throughout the centuries many attempts have been made by the poor to protest against their poverty. It is not generally known that a number of such protests have occurred at various times in the city and county of Limerick.

The location of one tragic and violent confrontation was the Lock Mills, a building which was situated close to where the Canal enters the Abbey river.

The years 1771 and 72 were a bleak period for the poor of the city. Unemployment, hardship and famine were widespread among the working classes. Efforts were made through loan funds and charitable works to alleviate the poverty among tradesmen and labourers but with little success.

Matters came to a head on 12th of May, 1772, when a starving crowd gathered outside the Lock Mills seeking food. The people believed that a quantity of corn was hoarded in the building. The Mayor, Christopher Carr, called out the soldiers and the mill was occupied by a sergeant's guard. The hunger-maddened crowd refused to disperse and was fired on by the guard. Three men on the opposite side of the Canal were killed.

The killing of the three men did nothing to assuage the anger or hunger of the people. On the following day another large crowd assembled in the Irishtown to renew the demands for bread or corn at the mill. The military was once again summoned and the 24th Regiment opened fire on the starving men and women. Three more people were killed, including a poor Park woman who was selling milk in Broad Street at the time.

No further attempts were made to seek food at the mill. The protest by the unarmed poor had been beaten down and crushed without pity.

The Lock Mills are long since closed and the buildings demolished, though the foundation stone has survived to this day. But no stone or plaque was ever erected to commemorate the brutal slaughter of the six people, five of whom were killed because they went to the Lock Mills to ask for bread to keep themselves alive, and the sixth because she continued to go about her everyday business of selling milk to her Irishtown customers.

The history books of Limerick have failed to record the names of the six people who were so callously gunned down by the trigger-happy military. Their lowly stations in life did not, apparently, merit the documentation of such basic details.

Although no monument exists to remind us of this important but forgotten chapter of Limerick history, let those of us who live in Limerick, close to the scene of that fatal demonstration of 209 years ago, preserve its memory. The people who were killed not only lived in the place where we now live but they were our own kind.

The Limerick Corporation has proposed that a new bridge be built to span the Abbey river between the Sandmall and the Dublin Road, alongside the spot where the shootings took place. To name the bridge after the six who gave their lives in the Siege of the Lock Mills would be a long overdue act of commemoration.

Such a gesture would not change past wrongs, but the new bridge should not serve only as a memorial to the distant dead but also as a permanent reminder to work for the elimination of injustice and poverty from the Limerick of the present.

H-BLOCK MILLIONAIRE

While the "freedom fighters" aim to "liberate" the fourth green field, the grass is certainly not growing under the feet of the H-Block/Provo supporter Gerry Jones.

According to newspaper reports, Jones stands to make millions following the decision of Dublin County Council to re-zone land belonging to him for housing and factories.

We can understand when we see Jones in the forefront of H-Block marches, but how can so-called socialists explain their presence side-by-side with this millionaire? **Answer:** If you've got a few millions to spare which might help the lost cause of waging war on the inhabitants of another field, then you're worth rubbing shoulders with!

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LIMERICK SOCIALIST
EVERY MONTH**

THE BRITISH LABOUR PARTY AND IRISH UNITY (1)

by Jim Kemmy

Ireland is divided into two parts. In a united Ireland two political systems would be changed. Therefore it is not very wise to take one part of Ireland for granted when discussing Irish unification. But this is what the NEC of the Labour Party does in the document on Northern Ireland which it is presenting to the 1981 Annual Conference. The unification of Ireland is proposed as party policy, and hardly anything is said about the Irish Republic.

Now it happens that the Irish Republic is the largest part of Ireland. It is also an independent state. No British Government can shape its politics. When British politicians consider the question of Irish unification, one would expect them to study the Republic very carefully. That they should take it for granted is astounding.

The NEC document puts at the heart of its programme the belief "that Ireland should, by peaceful means, and on the basis of consent, be united and the recognition that this will be achieved with the introduction of socialist policies." (Paragraph 17) Does the NEC envisage a future Labour Government extending direct rule to the South of Ireland? And assuming that it does not, has the likelihood that socialist policies will be introduced in the South of Ireland been calculated? If the NEC is saying that the introduction of socialist policies in Northern Ireland, irrespective of what is done in the Republic, would be sufficient basis for unification, no reason is given for saying so.

British political parties would do better to concentrate on giving Northern Ireland just, non-discriminatory and socially progressive government. They can do little to bring the two parts of Ireland closer together. The causes of division lie in Ireland. Whether the causes of division are removed is a question which only the future development of politics and society in Ireland can answer. Bold strokes in London can only be wild strokes, and the people, who want to make them have no understanding of Ireland. At the present moment the priority of intelligent Irish democrats is to form a normal, friendly, peaceful relationship between the two parts of Ireland; Irish unity is pie in the sky.

If, as Mr Benn says, partition was a crime against the Irish people, then in the succeeding sixty years the Irish people have continually committed the same crime against themselves. The two parts of Ireland have not grown closer during that period. They have diverged further apart. It is invariably the case that Irish nationalists and their sympathisers in British politics, in attempting to unite the two parts of Ireland by a short-cut, succeed only in distancing them more. The latest IRA campaign is the most spectacular example. After ten years of terrorist violence waged against partition, partition is more deeply entrenched than ever.

There is no short-cut, and the first step on the long road is to respect the democratically expressed will of the Protestant majority of Northern Ireland. Even if the reasons why they have rejected unity with the rest of Ireland were not clear, it would be foolish not to respect a commitment so long and stubbornly sustained by a majority in that area. But their reasons for preferring partition have not been kept secret and are easily stated.

Firstly, the Protestants in Northern Ireland have an historic attachment to Britain. They consider themselves British. Secondly, the Irish state since independence has been mainly unindustrial and dominated by the farming interests who would hardly have been sympathetic to the industrial society of Ulster. Thirdly, the Catholic Church has had a powerful illiberal influence on public and private life in the South of Ireland. Fourthly, politics there has been dominated by narrow-minded nationalists who scorned the Northern majority's British heritage and refused to accept their right to opt out of an anti-

British nation-state. Fifthly, there are some exaggerated and bigoted viewpoints in the Northern Protestant community which it is the business of democrats in that community to criticise.

There is a ferment of change in the Irish Republic at present, and many things are possible. But if there are people in the British Labour Party who take it for granted that socialist policies will be introduced in the Republic, I must say that they are taking a great deal for granted. Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, the two largest parties, are non-socialist, nationalist children of the old Sinn Fein Party. The Irish Labour Party, which began its political career by standing down from two general elections, has for sixty years afterwards competed half-heartedly against Sinn Fein's heirs. Living so long on the margin of Irish politics has broken its spirit.

The Irish Labour Party has never been in government except as the junior partner in a coalition with Fine Gael. In this year's general election Labour won fewer seats than in 1922. Very few of its own members, let alone anyone else, believe it is likely to form a government within their lifetimes.

Nevertheless, I believe that the prospects for a socialist break-through in the Irish Republic were never better. Far-reaching changes have taken place in society during the past two decades. The state has become urbanised and industrialised. Wage and salary earners now form the majority of the working population, whereas a short time ago most people worked on the land. The average age of the population is younger. In turn, public opinion is changing. Social priorities, Church-state relations, industrial organisation, attitudes to our own minorities and to Northern Ireland are all being questioned and criticised.

In this year's general election I was elected as an independent socialist (i.e. non-Irish Labour Party) to represent the constituency of Limerick East in the Irish Parliament. My election programme committed me to work for the following objectives: full employment; a comprehensive family planning service; an equitable tax system (the present system is biased against wage and salary earners); repeal of Articles 2 and 3 of the constitution which lay claim to Northern Ireland's territory; recognition of the right of the majority in Northern Ireland to live in the state of their own choosing and of the minority's entitlement to full civil and human rights.

I believe that this breakthrough can be repeated. Only democratic socialism can truly represent the emerging Ireland. Democratic socialism has been tried in Britain and many of its present difficulties result from the very scale of its past achievements. In Ireland it can truly be said that democratic socialism has not failed, it has never been tried. But nobody should suppose that the Irish Republic will have a socialist government within a couple of years, and nobody should underestimate the difficulties of clearing the ground.

Northern Ireland offers the surest test for distinguishing between the politics of the past and the politics of the future and its neighbouring state. The Northern majority's opposition to unification has produced some ridiculous confusions in the behaviour of politicians who want to be realists without being democrats. In May 1980 Mr Haughey went to London to argue against the British guarantee to the unionists, and while he was there countersigned the guarantee in the official joint communique, and when he returned denied that he had done any such thing. But it is a fact that a contemptuous, undemocratic and blinkered attitude to Northern Ireland has been the political consensus in the Republic. This attitude is embodied in the blunt claim over Northern Ireland's territory in Articles 2 and 3 of the constitution. These Articles must go, and this attitude

must change.

When the British Labour Party considers the question of Irish unification, it must not assume that the Irish Republic can be taken for granted, or that British government policy can in some way determine how the Republic evolves. The basic assumption of Irish nationalism in its blindly misguided policy towards Northern Ireland is precisely that the Republic can be taken for granted: there is only one problem, the deluded majority in Ulster. British politicians who think confusedly about Irish unification encourage the nationalists to keep living in the past and do no service to democratic socialists in Ireland.

Otherwise, it matters little whether the British Labour Party commits itself to Irish unification or not. If it committed itself to giving Northern Ireland good government and honoured its word when returned to office, that would do for a start.

(2)

There are some good ideas in the British Labour Party National Executive's document on Northern Ireland policy. These are mostly in the sections on improving direct rule and reforming local government. In particular, it is right that a Labour Government should repeal such legislation as the Payment of Debt Act which is directed against working people. As the authors say, it should not be acceptable to Labour that there are second class citizens anywhere in the United Kingdom.

However, there is a serious omission at the heart of the document which robs it of any realism. "At the heart of this programme", says the authors, "is a long and deeply-held belief in the Labour Party that Ireland should, by peaceful means, and on the basis of consent, be united and the recognition that this will be achieved with the introduction of socialist policies". But what must also be recognised is that if there is to be any real progress towards Irish unity, everything depends on what political changes take place in the Irish Republic where the British Labour Party has no power.

It is within the power of the British Labour Party to make a direct contribution to the assertion of socialist politics in Northern Ireland against the old, dead-end politics of nationalism and unionism. It will also be within its power, after it wins the next election (as I hope it will) to introduce socialist policies in Northern Ireland. But it will not have power to do either in the Irish Republic. If the dominant politics in the Irish Republic continue to be non-socialist, to deny full adherence to the principle of consent, and to give legal recognition to the doctrines of one religious grouping, Irish unity will not cease to be pie-in-the-sky and there is nothing the British Labour Party can do about it except protest.

A document based on a long-term perspective of Irish unity which does not recognise this factor is unrealistic. It may also be damaging. It may seem to support a political attitude which is still widespread in Ireland, written into the constitution of the Irish Republic, and must be overcome if Irish unity is ever to be a possibility: the attitude that there must be unity whether the majority in Northern Ireland likes it or not.

I know that the authors commit themselves to the principle of unity by consent. But so do all the major political parties in the Irish Republic, and yet in their political behaviour they do not respect that principle. They opposed the decision of the last Labour Government to increase Northern Ireland's representation at Westminster, even though this was no more than applying in Northern Ireland and the old Chartist principle of equal electoral districts. The attitude of the major parties here was that the people of Northern Ireland should not get democratic justice in the state where the majority of them wish to be citizens; they should be made second class citizens so as to teach them to change their preferences. Also, no government here has attempted to repeal Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution which lay claim to Northern Ireland's territory.

Leaving aside the wilder ideas which some of them have, there are three basic reasons why the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland is unfriendly to the Republic and hostile even to the discussion of Irish unity. They believe that politicians here do not truly respect their culture and their British citizenship,

are hypocritical in professing the principle of unity by consent and are in fact morally compromised in relation to the activities of the Provisional IRA. They believe that the Catholic Church has a considerable authoritarian influence in Irish public life. They believe that the Republic's politics are farmer-orientated, inappropriate to a modern industrial society, and cannot serve them nearly so well as the policies to which the British Labour Party has contributed so much. All these beliefs, regrettably, are true.

Present-day politics in the Republic is derived to a great extent from the old Sinn Fein Party. The two largest parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, are direct descendants of that party (which still survives in its extreme form as the political wing of the Provisional IRA!) These parties developed when the vast majority of people in the state lived on the land. During the last two decades there has been considerable industrialisation and there is now a majority of urban working people. But the working people are second class citizens in the Irish Republic. Until recently the farmers were not subject to income tax at all, and they still pay a much smaller proportion of their incomes than the workers.

What about the Irish Labour Party? readers will ask. That party cannot be compared to the British Labour Party. It has no definite relationship with the trade union movement. In 1930 its direct relationship with the trade union movement was broken by mutual consent. (The reason was that the trade union movement was a very small segment of society in those days, and it was hoped that the Labour Party could become broader-based and more powerful). But since then the Irish Labour Party has never made any progress, or even had a clear idea of where it wanted to go. It has become demoralised by living so long in the shade of its two larger rivals, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael.

In the recent general election (June '81) the Labour Party won less than a tenth of the seats, fewer than it won in the general election of 1922. Despite the urbanisation of Irish society and the present-day majority of wage and salary earners, most of the seats which the Labour Party won this year were in rural areas! Regarding the other major objections of the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland, the Irish Labour Party has never stood up for tolerance and minority rights against the authoritarianism of the Catholic Church, and it contains in its own constitution the undemocratic claim over Northern Ireland's territory which is enshrined in Articles 2 and 3 of the constitution of the state.

For several years I was an active member of the Irish Labour Party. In 1972 I left it because it was not socialist in any meaningful sense - it wasn't even a serious political party - and worked instead as an independent socialist in Limerick. This year I was elected to the Dail as an independent socialist for the constituency of Limerick East. These are among the objectives which my election programme committed me to work for: a programme of full employment; repeal of Articles 2 and 3 of the constitution; an equitable system of taxation; the introduction of a comprehensive family planning service; the introduction of a divorce law; the democratisation of education (which is overwhelmingly controlled by the Catholic Church).

Growing numbers of people in the Irish Republic want to make a clean break from the undemocratic and intolerant politics of nationalism. New developments are in the air. I believe that my own breakthrough can be built upon. But if politics in the Republic are to be transformed and socialism is to make an impact at last, one of our major priorities is to establish the principle of respect for the majority will in Northern Ireland, at any given time, on the constitutional issue. Up to now that principle has not been respected by the Republic's political parties. It is still not respected genuinely - Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution are there as proof. The British Labour Party should be aware of this and has a right to say it. When the National Executive imply that Irish unity will transform politics in Northern Ireland and the Republic, I believe they are putting the cart before the horse. Politics must be transformed first, or Irish unity will never be more than pie-in-the-sky.

(This article has also been published by the British journal "Labour Weekly".)

THE CORPORATION

FROM SHAWN-A-SCOOB

FROM
THE EXECUTION OF WILLIAM O'REGAN

by Michael Hogan

Swiftly to Limerick the escort came—
Five hundred troops round the van were seen;
And to end the drama of murder and shame,
They quickly proceeded to Gallows Green.
There the hangman was sternly at his post—
A new-spun rope from the gibbet swung—
He was after despatching the seventh ghost—
And another young man came on to be hung.
A brave young fellow of twenty-one,
His eyes were dark blue and his features fair;
Like sun-lit mist on the mountain lawn
Flowed the graceful rings of his flaxen hair.
He was promised pardon and gold to tell
Who his companions in treason were;
And his glance on his desolate mother fell,
As below the gibbet she knelt in prayer.
She looked up at the tempter and looked at her boy,
While scorn and anger rushed into her face;
And she cried, "Oh! my son, die! honestly die!
Say nothing—tell nothing, our name to disgrace;
Go clean to your God—leave no one undone—
Don't be an informer—despite their pelf—
Oh! my blessing be with you, my son! my son!
Mavourneed! let nobody cry but myself!"
They swung him off between earth and sky,
And they cut him down when his time was done;
And his lonely mother with a maniac cry,
Clasped the black stark corpse of her murdered son.
At distance a row of grim coffins lay,
In which weeping friends adjusted their dead.
To one of those she bore him away,
And settled him down in his dreary bed.
Next William O'Regan was led to his fate—
A sullen calmness arrested the crowd,
'Twas the dire suspense of horror and hate
Which the outraged people to silence bowed.
As he stepped on the ladder with manacled hand,
A wild weird shriek shook the standers-by;
For into the ring of the troopers' band
Dashed his maniac wife, with a furious cry.
She hurled the staggering soldiers aside,
And grasped her husband as frost grasps clay;
Some turned aloof, their emotion to hide,
As she fiercely struggled to drag him away.
'Twas her last fond clasp and her last farewell;

Life, strength, and affection no more allowed;
For powerless and pale at his feet she fell,
And was borne away by the pitying crowd.
He mounted the scaffold—the deadly rope
Was noosed on his manly neck white and fair;
To heaven he looked with a prayerful hope,
And in a moment he swung in air.
Brave Wilkinson¹ stood on the platform dread,
Scanning his watch, with a gathered frown;
And when fourteen minutes were past and sped,
He ordered the hangman to cut him down.
The man hesitated—the High Sheriff grasped
The sharp knife and cut the strong rope in twain
In the arms of friends the body was clasped,
And borne away to a house on the plain,
Where a doctor by Wilkinson was employed
To restore animation and bring the blood on,
But vainly, alas! was his practice tried,
For the spirit of William O'Regan was gone.

THE BARD'S PASTORAL

Dedicated to all who don't like it.

The world's a hive of vagabonds,
The Church a nest of knaves;
The State a den of scoundrels,
And the land a mart of slaves.
Princes, prelates, dukes and lords,
Are found a common clan;
But 'tis the devil's job on earth
To find an honest man.

'Tis true a base and servile heart
With God's love can't be warmed;
'Tis true a born vagabond
Can never be reformed.
No power can change the nature
Of the vicious and the vain,
Or breathe a manly spirit in
The sordid and the mean.

Meanness *is* not always found
 Among our poor-born kind;
 But the higher up the tree you look
 The more crows' nests you'll find.
 Thus these who from contemptuous grade
 To Fortune's tree-tops go,
 Are always a more voracious bird,
 Than those they leave below.

The dews of heaven descend alike
 Upon the flower and weed,
 The careless sun matures alike
 Earth's good and evil seed.
 Thus Fortune's devil-may-care behests
 Give circumstances such levelling,
 She flings owls into eagle's nests,
 And swine in flower-knots revelling.

These who on selfish servile wing
 To upper attics soar,
 Bling Fortune lets them up to show
 Their baseness more and more.
 They'll do no good for justice sake,
 For honour or for truth,
 Till down again to earth they fall
 Like useless rotten fruit.

Behold the dull unsocial churl
 Who scrapes up Mammon's dust,
 With a heart as cold as iron,
 And a soul as full of rust.
 He never held a helping hand,
 A neighbour to befriend;
 But damned himself to make a hoard
 For thankless rogues to spend.

Those rogues wear mourning for his death—
 His bier with pomp is crammed;
 But little do the mourners care
 If he be saved or damned.
 As long as they can clutch and sport
 His dearly-gathered "tin."
 They wish that God may never let
 The churl back again.

Behold upon the other hand
 The rampant wealthy mule,
 How he grasps at bostoon honours
 And is mad for poltroon rule.
 Oh! how he'd sway all heaven and earth,
 If he could catch the rod;
 With his head as full of wisdom
 As a maggot in a clod.

In years gone by the gifted man
 Won praise for high endeavour;
 But now it is the plotting rogue
 That wins the palm called "*clever*,"
 As long as he can blind the laws,
 And compromise his neighbour,
 The world's and the devil's applause
 Are sure to bless his labour.

Oh, nineteenth century! age accursed
 For all that's vile and sordid—
 Thou see'st the basest and the worst
 Of villainy rewarded.
 Not by the worthy hangman's hitch
 For crime's sublime reduction;
 But by a mode of getting rich
 On others black destruction.

Oh, century of intricate ways!
 Thou strumpet of all ages!
 The very infants in thy days
 Are born roguish sages.
 The boys that go to school are men
 Before they've learned a letter;
 They swear and smoke like tars, and then
 Improve on something better.

Oh, century of the cunning art
 And treacherous craft the dyer!
 You scarcely show a living heart
 Without its motio, "*Liar*".
 Tho' people preach and say fine prayers
 In seeming virtuous being,
 They cannot trust their eyes and ears
 In hearing or in seeing.

Falsehood's mask's so finely wove,
 We cannot know the wearer;
 The devil is hid in robes of love
 As he draws near and nearer.
 A calm smile hides the traitor's scoft,
 And honesty's his lecture;
 Till, ah, too late, the veil is off,
 And then we see the spectre.

The shells that glisten on the strand
 Look bright where Nature flung them;
 You may take hundreds in your hand,
 And find no pearl among them.
 Thus honest spirits are so few,
 And hypocrites so many;
 Scan actions well and find them true
 Ere you confide in any.

OLD POLITICS - NEW POLITICS

SUBMISSION BY SOCIALISTS AGAINST NATIONALISM TO THE TAOISEACH DR. FITZGERALD, ON THE H-BLOCKS HUNGER STRIKE, AND ARTICLES 2 AND 3 OF THE CONSTITUTION - DELIVERED AT MEETING, 19 AUGUST 1981.

We would like you to hear our views on the following points: (1) British "inflexibility"; (2) the strategy of the IRA in the H-Block campaign; (3) your own electoral mandate in relation to the H-Block campaign; (4) the necessity to work publicly towards the repeal of Articles 2 and 3 of the constitution.

(1) Last December you told the Dail that governments of this state had saved lives by standing firm against hunger-strikes for political status and no government here could rightly or consistently urge a British government to concede to such demands. But political status is still the issue in the H-Blocks dispute. Prison reform has **not** become the issue. The attitude which the British government is taking towards the IRA prisoners protest would be intransigent and unwise if taken towards a protest by prisoners for prison reform. Since the IRA's protest is for political status, the British government's attitude is simply the attitude of a government that does not propose to abdicate its authority.

The last Coalition Government, in which you were Minister for Foreign Affairs, was "inflexible", "intransigent", "inhumane", etc., in dealing with an IRA hunger-strike for political status in Portlaoise Prison - and rightly so. From the beginning that government took the attitude that it would make no concessions under duress. To concede under duress would be to abdicate its authority. When the IRA became convinced that the government would continue standing firm and could not be moved, it called off the hunger-strike. The government was seen to have upheld its authority and the IRA was seen to have been defeated.

At times you yourself appear to accept the claim that the H-Blocks prisoners' own position has been modified, so that they no longer insist on political status. Their statement of July 4th is usually cited as evidence of this. That statement begins by accusing the British government of creating the problem when it abolished special category status, and then seems to say that special category status is not being demanded - there would be no objection if the five demands were conceded to all prisoners. Of course there wouldn't, the five demands, if conceded to the Maze prisoners under their parliamentary discipline, would add up in themselves to political status.

Your government should denounce the hunger-strike as emotional and political blackmail, and should pressurise the hunger-strikers to call it off rather than pressurise the British government to concede to it.

(2) The IRA is using the H-Blocks dispute in an attempt to: (1) legitimise its terrorist campaign in Northern Ireland; (2) reverse a series of strategic losses it has incurred since 1976, and (3) gain broad public sympathy. Your government has central importance for its strategy in the campaign outside the prison. The latest issue of the Provo paper **an Phoblacht** says: "The three cornerstones of the Irish establishment - the Catholic hierarchy, the SDLP and the Free State government - still have to be pushed into a position of public support for the prisoners which will bring the chain reaction, nationally and internationally, which will result in the breaking of Thatcher".

Whenever your government is seen to pressurise the British government to concede to the hunger-strikers, the IRA is encouraged to believe that eventually you can be stampeded.

Doubtless you have no intention of being stampeded into expelling the British Ambassador, withdrawing troops from the Border, etc. But by succumbing to fear of the tactical successes which the IRA has gained during the hunger-strike, haven't you already been stampeded just a little bit?

You have spoken of the need to reverse the recent run of IRA successes. But it is important to distinguish between tactical and strategic successes for the IRA. The recent IRA successes have all been purely tactical; their strategic success or failure depends on **how** (not **when**) the hunger-strike ends. The very last way to reverse their series of minor, transitory, tactical successes is to concede them a major, lasting, strategic success. But this would appear to be what your government is urging the British government to do.

(3) What is your own electoral mandate on the H-Blocks issue? It is hard to see any evidence that the people of the Republic expect you to row in on the prisoners' side against the British government. Despite the emotive appeal of the hunger-strike, only two H-Blocks TDs were elected - as compared to four Sinn Fein TDs in 1957. Jim Kemmy was elected in Limerick on a platform that included explicit opposition to the hunger-strike.

Your government, rightly, did not send representation to the paramilitary funeral of Kieran Doherty, TD. We did not notice any spontaneous popular anger at your decision. Besides, only two TDs out of 164 chose to attend that funeral. Surely, more than two TDs would have felt it worth their while to attend, if there was any upsurge of anger in the Republic against the British government's conduct? It is fashionable to say that the hunger-strike is enabling the IRA to destabilise politics in the Republic. We can see no evidence of this, but we think there is a danger of politics in the Republic becoming **debased** if the government succumbs to such fears.

The majority of the people in the Republic would not be happy to see the IRA reestablish its fortunes. In substance this means that you have a mandate to oppose the H-Block campaign: to emphasise on all occasions the destructiveness of the hunger-strike, the IRA's responsibility for it, and the necessity for it to be abandoned.

(4) The H-Block campaign aims at poisoning relations between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, between Northern Protestants and the people of the Republic, and between the governments of Britain and the Republic. Is it really necessary to let the hunger-strikers veto any discussion of possible **improvements** in these relations? Most people in the Republic want to see them improved. You should revert in public to the constructive proposal you made in Dail Eireann on May 29th, 1980, when you urged the then Taoiseach Mr. Haughey "to get rid of the obstacle to improved North-South relations posed by Articles 2 and 3 of the constitution", and thereby show that the Republic was serious about aiming for unity only by consent. Nine hunger-strikers have died, ultimately, for unity **without** the consent of the majority in Northern Ireland. By putting further pressure on Mr. Haughey to define his position on Articles 2 and 3, you would help to wipe out the doublethink that makes any real improvement in North-South relations impossible, and which the H-Block campaigners thrive on and seek to foster.